United Nations E/CN.18/2002/12

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 January 2002

Original: English

United Nations Forum on Forests
Second session
4-15 March 2002
Item 4 (f) of the provisional agenda*
Common items for each session: monitoring, assessment and reporting

Letter dated 18 December 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the report of the International Expert Meeting on Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting on the Progress towards Sustainable Forest Management, which was held in Yokohama, Japan, from 5 to 8 November 2001 (see annex).

I should be grateful if the report could be issued as a document for the second session of the United Nations Forum on Forests in order to facilitate the work of that body.

(*Signed*) Yukio **Satoh**
Permanent Representative

* E/CN.18/2002/1.

02-21671 (E) 110202

Annex to the letter dated 18 December 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

REPORT

Country-led initiative in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests
INTERNATIONAL EXPERT MEETING
ON MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING
ON THE PROGRESS TOWARD SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT
5-8 November 2001, Yokohama, Japan

BACKGROUND

A country-led initiative in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) entitled, "International Expert Meeting on Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting on the Progress toward Sustainable Forest Management" was held in Yokohama, Japan from 5-8 November 2001. The meeting was hosted by the Japanese Government, and the co-sponsors were Australia, Brazil, Ghana, Indonesia, Malaysia, Norway, and the United States of America. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a forum for exchanging views on monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR) within the UNFF context, with the aim of contributing to deliberations in support of the UNFF. The focus was on how countries could report on their progress toward sustainable forest management (SFM) and also on progress in the implementation of the Proposals for Action (PfA) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). Representatives from 31 countries, 9 international organizations and regional processes, and 4 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the meeting.

The meeting recalled that the first session of the UNFF (UNFF 1), held in New York in June 2001, agreed that the UNFF's function of MAR would comprise the following areas:

(1) "Progress in implementation of the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests";
(2) "Progress towards sustainable forest management of all types of forests"; and
(3) "Review of the effectiveness."

Furthermore, UNFF 1 stressed *"the importance of the use of regional and national criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management as a basis for reporting on sustainable forest management."*

The meeting was co-chaired by T. Kajiya from Japan and H.C. Thang from Malaysia.

The following report summarises the discussions and major highlights of the meeting and is not intended to convey consensus views. It is expected that detailed proceedings of the meeting will be prepared in advance of UNFF 2.

DAY 1: MONDAY, 5 NOVEMBER

Opening Addresses

Mr. Tetsuo Kato, Director-General of the Forestry Agency of Japan, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. Mr. Knut Øistad, Deputy Director General, Forest Department,

Ministry of Agriculture, Norway, thanked the Japanese Government and co-sponsors for hosting the meeting, and emphasized that the meeting will make an important contribution to deliberations at UNFF on MAR. Mr. Manoel Sobral Filho, Executive Director, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), emphasized the usefulness of criteria and indicators (C&I) for SFM, an initiative that ITTO was credited with pioneering. Mr. Jagmohan Maini, Coordinator and Head, United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat, outlined the mandate of the UNFF on MAR and emphasized that the primary beneficiaries must be countries, that MAR should be cost effective and policy relevant, and that reporting in the UNFF context were to be based on a voluntary system.

Plenary Session: Presentations on MAR on the Progress toward SFM

The first day concentrated on experiences with MAR on SFM. Eleven presentations were given, including one overview of C&I processes, five presentations on regional and international C&I processes (ITTO, Tarapoto, Montréal, MCPFE [1], Dry-Zone Africa Processes), three country case studies on C&I (Finland, Japan, Malaysia), one paper on a Brazilian forest information system, and a World Resources Institute paper on its Global Forest Watch project.

Discussions on the Presentations

Discussions on the presentations highlighted the following key points:

- C&I for SFM have contributed to the development of a common vision of what constitutes SFM. C&I provide countries with a framework for defining SFM and assessing progress toward this goal. While the C&I framework may not be the only mechanism for MAR on SFM, it is one that has been widely accepted. Together, 9 international and regional C&I processes involve approximately 150 countries and cover most of the world's forested area;

- There is a high degree of similarity in the criteria identified by the processes; all incorporate, in some fashion, the same fundamental elements of SFM. The indicators for each criterion, however, vary from process to process;

- Many countries had gone through a process of evaluating the indicators (identified in their respective C&I process) in terms of applicability to their own country, and sometimes added new national or sub-national indicators to reflect their particular conditions;

- Processes and countries are at different stages in development and implementation of C&I;

- Implementing C&I is complex and can be costly. Several participants noted the need for support in capacity building and financial assistance. The potential for international cooperation in implementing C&I was also mentioned;

- A phased approach would encourage a wider implementation of C&I;

[1] MCPFE: Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe

- Undertaking participatory assessment of C&I in an open and transparent manner can lead to a strong consensus and commitment among stakeholders, but it is often a long-term exercise;

- The monitoring and assessment of some indicators, in particular those on socio-economic functions, protective functions and biological diversity, have been found to be difficult. It was observed that, nevertheless, it might be a mistake to disregard indicators on the basis of difficulty in their monitoring and assessment;

- In a number of countries, the results of monitoring and assessment using C&I for SFM have already been factored into domestic policy. Some participants noted the importance of having a stable and transparent political environment for the results of monitoring and assessment to have an impact;

- A few participants noted that some specific issues (e.g., illegal trade and illegal logging) are not explicitly addressed in the indicators of some C&I processes. It was suggested that such issues could be addressed in MAR on SFM as countries choose;

- Countries are already reporting to a number of international conventions, agreements and processes, as well as to international organizations, which maintain data and information bases related to forests. These databases and reports, which represent a rich source of existing information on forests, should be used to assess progress on SFM; and

- It was expressed that new information technologies provide the potential to make an increasing contribution to collecting, analyzing, and reporting data on forest trends and activities.

DAY 2: TUESDAY, 6 NOVEMBER

Working Group Discussions

On the second day, two working groups discussed four questions about MAR on progress toward SFM in the UNFF context.

Question 1: Within the context of UNFF, what do you feel is the purpose of MAR on country progress towards sustainable forest management?

The participants, recognizing that all countries have some MAR systems in place for the purposes of national planning, policy formulation and budget allocation, agreed that reporting in the UNFF context should add value. The participants identified the following benefits of MAR on SFM at both, the national and international level:

- Stimulating discussion, identification of opportunities and gaps, prioritizing actions, and building consensus within countries through the preparation of national reports;

- Identifying concrete actions that can be taken at the bilateral, regional and international levels to facilitate country efforts to progress toward SFM;

- Providing a framework to support informed decisions and policy guidance at all levels, and for reporting comprehensively on trends towards SFM;

- Catalyzing broader participation of stakeholders at various levels, in particular the national and sub-national level;

- Offering opportunities to establish an information flow focused on national processes and cross-cutting issues beyond conventional data collection;

- Contributing to the mobilization of technical, financial and capacity-building assistance;

- Raising public awareness of the national and global importance of forests and strengthening political commitment towards SFM;

- Sharing experiences, identifying emerging issues and promoting mutual understanding among countries and others through reporting and discussion at UNFF of success stories and obstacles to implementation;

- Identifying national, regional, and global trends in forests, forest condition and availability of goods and services from forests over time, as well as transboundary issues;

- Clarifying forests' contributions to global environmental functions and facilitating reporting to global conventions and agreements related to forests;

- Improving the global picture of forests, which can *inter alia* help in identifying innovative investment opportunities and positioning forests goods and services in global markets; and

- Supporting UNFF's function of promoting implementation, including through sharing and feedback of lessons learned.

Question 2: How do you monitor, assess and report on progress towards sustainable forest management in your country (both currently and in the future)?

Participants shared their experiences on MAR on progress towards SFM in their countries. Participants at the meeting indicated that:

- Most countries report every one or two years on some aspect of their forests. Some data are collected annually while more detailed data may be collected every 5-10 years;

- Many countries use C&I as a basis for national reporting, and many others are building toward the use of C&I in the near future;

- Countries tend to focus on those indicators that are most relevant to their national context;

- Some countries have generally adopted a phased approach to implementing a system of C&I, i.e., they have begun using those indicators for which they have data and plan to expand MAR to other indicators and data and resources become available;

- Incorporation of input from the local level can lead to better informed decisions at the national level;

- Countries conduct MAR through a variety of processes, which can involve sub-national data collection by various parties, including NGOs and local communities;

- To enhance credibility, MAR should involve meaningful stakeholder participation and include bottom-up aggregation of information, in particular qualitative data;

- National forest inventories are essential to the effectiveness of MAR;

- The use of C&I reporting is important both for influencing policymakers and for securing budgets for SFM;

- The challenges of focusing on national MAR, including within the framework of C&I. Difficulties exist in addressing critical issues related to forests (e.g., forest values, water, biodiversity and carbon, agricultural policies, landscape level issues, and macroeconomic issues);

- Various reporting frameworks at national, regional and international levels may not be compatible; and

- Finding commonalities and complementarity between C&I for SFM and reporting for various other processes of environment and sustainable development will facilitate effective links and cross-sectoral relations between SFM and other policy frameworks.

Question 3: How do countries report internationally (now and in the future) on their progress towards sustainable forest management?

Participants briefly reviewed the extensive list of international conventions, agreements, organizations and instruments to which they already report on forest-related issues. They all stressed the need to reduce the existing reporting burden on countries. Country reports are not intended to be used for inter-country comparisons.

Suggestions to improve and facilitate reporting include:

- Encouraging conventions and organizations to work together to streamline, coordinate and synchronize reporting requirements to the extent possible (e.g., the recent development by FAO, UN-ECE and ITTO of a joint questionnaire on forest products statistics);

- Facilitating coordination of national reporting can lead to a comprehensive national report, which in the opinion of some could provide more consistent information and might be used for all international reporting on forests;

- Maximizing the congruence of data requirements for comprehensive national and international reporting on progress towards SFM;

- Development of national electronic interactive databases on forests where all the countries' relevant data could be stored, continually updated and would be easily accessible for reporting at all levels;

- Regional and international C&I-processes are tools for international MAR on progress towards SFM;

- Structuring national reporting around the C&I framework, recognizing that some countries do not use C&I in their monitoring systems, while others use national policy processes (e.g., national forest programmes); and

- Better use of national focal points.

Participants also made other more general recommendations regarding data collection and reporting including:

- The need to address the many gaps in forest-related data, as well as timeliness, accuracy, and reliability;

- Advantages of collecting more data that is spatially referenced; and

- Desire of countries to receive feedback on data and information supplied to international conventions and organizations.

Question 4: What do you think is the most appropriate structure (what to report?) and mechanism (how to report?) for countries' reporting to UNFF on their progress towards sustainable forest management?

Participants noted the importance of reporting on both SFM and on the implementation of the IPF/IFF PfA, taking into account their potential linkages. Participants expressed a variety of views on how and what countries should report on their progress toward SFM, including the following:

- Reporting on progress towards SFM in the UNFF context should build on existing data and information including from C&I, so as not to increase the reporting burden on countries;

- Countries may use regional and international processes to report their progress towards SFM through the use of C&I;

- Without losing the richness of national reports stemming from national forest programmes or other processes, there could be a focus on aggregated information and lessons learned on the specific task of working towards SFM;

- Possibilities for synchronizing reporting for SFM should be addressed by UNFF;

- Country reporting should be sufficiently flexible to reflect country priorities;

- Establishment of baseline reports enable better measurement of progress;

- Inclusion of tangible commitments by countries is important to gain credibility, as is evidence of stakeholder involvement and reliability of information;

- Progress toward SFM should be keyed to the thematic agenda of individual UNFF sessions; be solution-oriented and focused on lessons learned or specific obstacles;

- Encourage the focus of reporting on SFM to be linked to UNFF agenda items, while allowing comprehensive national reports on SFM including emerging or priority issues;

- Early submission of written country reports on progress toward SFM would allow the Secretariat and/or CPF members to provide each UNFF session with a compilation that analyzed trends and common successes and obstacles while ensuring that the original complete country reports were made widely available; and

- Reports should be, where possible, transmitted electronically and posted on the internet.

DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER

Plenary Session: Presentations on MAR on the Progress in Implementation of IPF/IFF Proposals for Action

The third day focused on MAR on implementation of the IPF/IFF PfA. Four presentations were made, two on country experiences (Australia and Indonesia), one on the use of C&I to report on PfA, and one on a proposal by UNDP and FAO to support countries in their assessment of PfA and identification of actions.

Australia had undertaken a comprehensive exercise to analyze all the PfA and produced a guidebook that sought to summarize and group the proposals to facilitate implementation. Australia then analyzed the relevance of all the PfA to Australia's context, evaluated the extent of their implementation, and prioritized the need for future action.

Discussions on the Presentations

The discussions highlighted the following points:

- The Australian guidebook could be usefully drawn on by other countries to help determine their own priorities and methodology for implementation;

- C&I could be a useful framework for MAR on PfA implementation. The commonality of criteria across international processes facilitate mutual comprehension of efforts to implement the PfA. In addition, a number of proposals directly correspond to specific indicators in a range of processes. In other cases, indicators could be used as a point of departure, or framework, for MAR;

- There were differing views on the conceptual relevance and feasibility of using C&I as a means of monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress in the implementation of the IPF/IFF PfA;

- The framework used by countries to monitor, assess and report on implementation may vary, as illustrated by the fact that some use C&I and some use national forest programmes; and

- The need was noted for further capacity-building, training and financial assistance to help support efforts to monitor, assess and report on implementation of IPF/IFF PfA.

Working Group Discussions

Two working groups discussed two questions related to MAR on implementation of the IPF/IFF PfA.

Question 1: What aspects (purposes, approaches and methods) could countries take into account when carrying out monitoring and assessment of the implementation of IPF/IFF Proposals for Action?

- IPF/IFF PfA are used politically and strategically to inform and refine national policy processes and development;

- Implementation of the IPF/IFF PfA is a means to progress toward SFM, rather than an end in itself;

- Monitoring and assessment can help identify priorities, successes, needed actions and potential for collaboration;

- Monitoring and assessment methods and processes need to be transparent and involve all stakeholders;

- The Six-Country Initiative and the Australian exercise, as well as grouping by the 16-elements of UNFF, are useful tools for countries to systematically assess the relevance of PfA and prioritize their implementation in their domestic context;

- Monitoring and assessment may be integrated into national forest programmes or other national policy processes related to forests;

- Independent auditing of country implementation of IPF/IFF PfA may be a useful tool to demonstrate credibility;

- International and regional organizations, processes and bodies could facilitate countries' consultation and initiatives on MAR on the implementation of PfA;

- The CPF members and international cooperation can play a role in assisting countries in monitoring and assessment of IPF/IFF PfA;

- Support CPF members organizations to work towards reducing international reporting demands on countries;

- C&I can be a useful framework for monitoring, assessment and reporting, but do not cover all of the PfA;

- Not all countries monitor and assess the implementation of IPF/IFF PfA in a separate process; those that do so, vary in regularity;

- In national assessment of PfA, approaches vary widely in the extent of the process, as well as in depth of the dialogue; while some countries assess the PfA only once, others may revisit them periodically; and

- Country focal points can facilitate monitoring and assessment.

Question 2: Based on country experiences with implementation of IPF/IFF Proposals for Action, would creating voluntary guidelines facilitate country monitoring, assessment and reporting in the UNFF context?

- The following range of options for how countries could report to the UNFF on their implementation of the PfA emerged from the discussion:

  (a) Annual reports on the status of implementation of the full range of IPF/IFF PfA;
  (b) Annual reports focused on the implementation of those PfA related to the agenda of each UNFF-session (with the option to report more broadly if desired); and
  (c) A single report to UNFF 5 on the implementation of all PfA;

- Many participants were in favor of option (b), based in part on its likely contribution to focusing session discussion and debate;

- Some underscored that user-friendly recommendations already existed on the systematic assessment of PfA and the monitoring and assessment of their implementation (e.g., Practitioners' Guide of the Six-Country Initiative, the Australian exercise, and the 16 thematic elements of the Plan of Action of the UNFF);

- The importance of inviting major groups to report was noted, and several experts recalled the fact that CPF members and other organizations and actors were also expected to report on IPF/IFF PfA implementation;

- To make UNFF sessions more constructive and effective:

  - Many believed the establishment of some type of flexible guidelines for reporting on PfA implementation to UNFF are needed. Some underscored that such guidelines should allow for countries to report using the framework of their preferred national policy processes;

  - The possible use of a simple Secretariat-provided Table of Contents/questionnaire to organize presentations was noted;

- A proposal was made that countries report to UNFF on the methodological issues related to carrying out MAR on implementation of PfA;

- The point was made, however, that countries should have latitude to focus on the issues they considered most relevant, with emphasis on success stories as well as obstacles and gaps;

- Timely provision of advance written reports might usefully permit the Secretariat or CPF members to compile aggregated reports that identified emerging trends; and

- The original complete reports should be made widely available, including electronically on the Internet.

DAY 4: THURSDAY, 7 NOVEMBER

The following note was added after the meeting by the organizer of the International Expert Meeting.

Plenary Session: Presentations on MAR on the Progress toward SFM

Presentations were made on the conclusions of the working groups on MAR on the progress towards SFM and MAR on the progress in implementation of the IPF/IFF PfA.

Discussions on the presentations highlighted the following key points:

MAR on the progress towards SFM

- Feedback on data and information within countries is important;

- It should be noted that there is an overarching goal of MAR in the context of SFM that has not been discussed in any of the working groups: through a comprehensive MAR-process on SFM that is thoroughly communicated, foresters can make a comprehensive, holistic story about the role and functions of forests, and they can demonstrate how productive and protective functions of forests can be combined;

- There is also a role of MAR in articulating and tracking tangible and measurable goals, milestones and commitments that does not necessary come out in C&I; and

- MAR based on a set of key indicators is also useful for those countries that do not have yet the human and financial resources to carry on a comprehensive C&I process.

MAR on the progress in implementation of IPF/IFF PfA

- Some participants observed that there was not enough emphasis in the discussion of both working groups on the relative role that national forest programmes can play in MAR. In a lot of countries, the national forest programme-framework provides a useful basis for MAR.

- The importance of C&I was recognized also for MAR on the progress in implementation of IPF/IFF PfA. However, C&I processes alone are unable to report on all the necessary information.

Adoption of report

Participants considered the draft report and following a few amendments were satisfied that this reflect the full range of views expressed during the meeting.

Closing of Session

The co-chairs thanked all the participants for their productive contribution to the discussion and officially closed the meeting.

The participants expressed their gratitude to the Governments of Australia, Brazil, Ghana, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Norway and the United States of America. The participants also extended their deep appreciation to the Government and the people of Japan for hosting the meeting as well as for their kind hospitality.